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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 06 BEIJING 002827

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [KOLY](#) [CH](#) [UN](#)  
SUBJECT: THE U.S.)CHINA HUMAN RIGHTS DIALOGUE, AFTERNOON  
SESSION: RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, TIBET

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.  
4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) May 26, 2008; 3:00 p.m.; Beijing, Diaoyutai State Guesthouse.

[1](#)2. (U) Participants:

U.S.  
David J. Kramer, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor  
John V. Hanford, Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom  
Thomas Christensen, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs  
Dan Piccuta, Charge d'Affaires, a.i., U.S. Embassy Beijing  
Robert K. Harris, Assistant Legal Advisor, Department of State  
Richard W. Behrend, PRM Advisor, Department of State  
Susan O'Sullivan, Senior Advisor, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, Department of State  
Dan Kritenbrink, Internal Unit Chief, Political Section, Embassy Beijing  
Emilie L. Kao, Foreign Affairs Officer, Bureau of Democracy Human Rights, and Labor, Department of State  
Jeannette M. Windon, Special Assistant, Office of Democracy and Global Affairs, Department of State  
Steve Goldrup, Second Secretary, U.S. Embassy Beijing  
Andrea Goodman, Political Officer, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Department of State  
Ben Moeling, Deputy Chief, Political Section, Embassy Beijing (notetaker)  
Jim Brown, Interpreter

PRC  
Wu Hailong, Director General, International Organizations and Conferences Department, MFA  
Shen Yongxiang, Deputy Director General, International Organizations and Conferences Department, MFA  
Yao Maochen, Deputy Inspector, United Front Work Department, CPC Central Committee  
Teng Wei, Deputy Director General, Criminal Division, Legislative Affairs Commission of the National People's Congress Standing Committee  
Wan Yonghai, Presiding Judge, Second Criminal Division, Supreme People's Court  
Sun Maoli, Deputy Director General, Legal Affairs Department, Ministry of Public Security  
Liu Guoyu, Deputy Director General, Prison Administration Department, Ministry of Justice  
Guo Wei, Director General, Foreign Affairs Department, State Administration for Religious Affairs  
Liu Zhengrong, Director General (acting), Fifth Department, State Council Information Office  
Suolang Renzeng, Deputy Chief, Administration for Ethnic and Religious Affairs, Tibetan Autonomous Region  
Zhao Yubin, Division Director, North American and Oceanian

Affairs Department, MFA  
Yan Jiarong, Division Director, International Organizations  
and Conferences Department, MFA  
Yao Shaojun, Deputy Division Director, International  
Organizations and Conferences Department, MFA  
Xu Jing, Deputy Division Director, International  
Organizations and Conferences Department, MFA  
Zu Yanwei, Attache, International Organizations and  
Conferences Department, MFA  
Liu Lingxiao, Attache, International Organizations and  
Conferences Department, MFA  
Fang Qiang, Interpreter, MFA

#### SUMMARY

13. (C) In the Second Session of the 14th U.S.-China Human Rights Dialogue (HRD) on May 26, 2008, Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom John Hanford covered issues involving all major religious groups in China with emphasis on registration of religious groups (including house churches) and religious traditions regarded as sacred by Tibetan Buddhists (including the recognition of spiritual leaders) and Uighur Muslims (including the hajj). Ambassador Hanford followed up on several matters discussed during previous trips to China, including the 2002 HRD, in an effort to gain agreement on issues that were raised during those meetings. Ambassador Hanford raised the U.S.-China Interagency Working Group on Religious Freedom, which he had first discussed in 2002 with former MFA International Organizations Department Director General Li Baodong. (Note: In a private discussion with Ambassador Hanford later,

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Director General Wu Hailong indicated that he would honor DG Li's commitment and establish the working group.) In response to a query from Ambassador Hanford, a representative of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) clarified that the right to freedom of religious belief guaranteed by China's constitution extends to children under the age of 18. Assistant Secretary Kramer raised issues involving Tibet, including our request that the Chinese provide information on persons detained after the March protests in Tibet to their families, that lawyers be allowed to represent these detainees and that "patriotic education campaigns" that force Tibetans to denounce the Dalai Lama be discontinued. He urged China to cease vilification of the Dalai Lama. End Summary.

#### AMBASSADOR HANFORD: THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN CHINA

14. (C) Ambassador Hanford offered his condolences to the Chinese people on the destruction caused by the Sichuan earthquake and thanked Director General Wu Hailong for the invitation to visit China, as well as the hospitality the Chinese Government has shown. He recalled his two previous trips to China and noted that SARA had helped facilitate his travel within China and had helped him better understand the role of religion in Chinese society. He acknowledged that China has had Muslim, Buddhist, Christian believers for thousands of years and is home to Taoism and Confucianism.

15. (C) Religion continues to grow stronger in China, Ambassador Hanford said. According to recent estimates, there are as many as 300 million religious believers in China. And, as President Hu Jintao has stated, the Communist Party intends to fully implement the Party's policy of religious freedom and has recognized the role religious believers can play in building a "harmonious society" that is peaceful, stable and prosperous.

#### RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

16. (C) Ambassador Hanford said the United States and China

came to agreement on several issues during the 2002 Human Rights Dialogue, including religious education for minors. Over the years, the U.S. side has heard reports of arrests and harassment related to the teaching of children at their places of worship, and even at home. In Ambassador Hanford's two previous visits, he had productive discussions with Chinese officials in which they clarified relevant Chinese policies and agreed to make China's policies more public by posting a statement. He commended the 2005 decision by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to post a notice on its website that no laws restrict religious education in China and that parents are allowed to instruct their children in religious matters. Ambassador Hanford said he personally had observed churches where young children attend Sunday School classes. However, Ambassador Hanford noted that implementation of the religious education for minors policy in China is uneven.

17. (C) Ambassador Hanford asked the Chinese Government to codify the right of children to practice religion and instruct the religious affairs bureaus about this policy at all levels. He asked the Chinese Government to amend article 14 of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region's 1993 implementing measures on the Law for the Protection of Minors to reflect this policy. He requested that the Chinese clarify whether Article 36 of the Constitution, which protects Chinese citizens' freedom of religious belief, applies to all Chinese citizens or only those who have reached the age of 18.

#### HOUSE CHURCHES

18. (C) Ambassador Hanford raised the issue of the Chinese policy toward worship in private homes by families or groups of friends. He reminded the Chinese that in 2002 they affirmed the right of families and friends to hold worship meetings in their homes without registering. However, the U.S. Government continues to receive reports that implementation of this policy is sporadic. Arrests, beatings, harassment and fines continue to be reported, including one case where the leader of a house group was put into a mental institution. Recently, Ambassador Hanford stated, legal scholar and house church Christian Fan Yafeng had a prayer meeting interrupted. This was particularly difficult to understand because the purpose of the meeting was to pray for the victims of the Sichuan earthquake.

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19. (C) Ambassador Hanford reiterated his request that the Chinese Government codify its friends and family worship policy, and provide training for local officials to implement this policy. Many of the issues that alarm the American people have to do with these sorts of cases. Ambassador Hanford stressed that addressing these issues more vigorously would go a long way toward mollifying criticisms. Americans, he said, identify with Chinese people of faith no matter what their religion. He cited two cases that have been widely-publicized in America as examples of reports that provoke criticism. He raised the arrests of 270 house church pastors in Shandong and the imprisonment of Shuang Shuying, the 76-year-old mother of a house church leader who was sentenced to two years in prison. These cases regularly generate inquiries from members of Congress and concerned American citizens.

#### INTER-AGENCY WORKING GROUP

10. (C) In 2002, Ambassador Hanford made a specific request to China to set up an Interagency Working Group on Religious Freedom comprising government agencies involved in regulating or prosecuting religious activity. Then-Director General Li Baodong, after gaining approval from other Chinese Government agencies, confirmed to Ambassador Hanford that the Working Group would be established. In 2002, DG Li affirmed this in

a letter to then-Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Lorne Craner. (NOTE: Ambassador Hanford handed DG Wu a copy of the 2002 letter from former MFA DG Li, which is contained in reftel.) The letter stipulated that the other agencies on the Chinese side would be the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the State Administration for Religious Affairs, the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, the Ministry of Public Security and the United Front Work Department. Ambassador Hanford noted that the White House Office of Faith-Based Initiatives can potentially serve in a supplementary capacity as issues of faith-based aid arise. The purpose of the Working Group is to facilitate quiet bilateral interaction on these issues and to enable the two sides to work together quickly and efficiently when religious freedom problems arise. On the sidelines, DG Wu later told Ambassador Hanford that he would honor former DG Li's commitment and establish the Working Group. Ambassador Hanford noted that he hopes to return soon to China to continue discussion of these key issues.

¶11. (C) Ambassador Hanford noted that in 2002, China agreed to invite the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion to visit, and therefore, he urged the Chinese Government to set specific dates for a visit of UN Special Rapporteur Asma Jahangir.

#### COMMUNIST PARTY RULES, GROWTH OF RELIGION, LEGAL EXCHANGE

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¶12. (C) Ambassador Hanford observed that in 2002 he suggested that the Communist Party of China consider a change in its policy to admit religious believers into its ranks. In 2002, Ambassador Hanford was told that this "was under discussion."

A change in policy would be consistent with the recent amendments to the Party Charter, which states that "The Party . . . rallies religious believers in making contributions to economic and social development."

¶13. (C) Ambassador Hanford raised the issue of the problems created by the small number of registered places of worship. In Beijing, he noted, there seem to be limited opportunities to worship. There are approximately 20 Protestant churches, 10 Catholic churches, 70 mosques and a hundred temples. This number seems far too low for a city of 17 million people and a growing population of religious believers. What plans, Ambassador Hanford asked, does China have to accommodate its growing numbers of religious believers?

¶14. (C) Ambassador Hanford raised the need for a national campaign on the importance of religion in society, citing the enormous growth of religion in society in recent years. He emphasized that in 2002, he and Zhuo Xinping of the World Religions Institute at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences agreed on the necessity of initiating such a campaign.

(NOTE: Zhuo briefed the Politburo at President Hu Jintao's request in December 2007 on the growth of religion in China.)

¶15. (C) Ambassador Hanford expressed the view that a new law on religion would benefit China and that the National People's Congress could invite outside experts on religious

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freedom to provide input. Ambassador Hanford said he believed there was openness to this idea in 2002 and that it is consistent with China's claims that it is open to holding legal exchanges with the United States. (NOTE: The prospect of legal exchanges was raised in the morning session of the plenary by L/HRR Assistant Legal Advisor Robert K. Harris.)

¶16. (C) Ambassador Hanford raised the issue of China's educational curriculum, and how religion is handled in schools. President Hu has stated the positive role that religious believers can play in society. With that in mind, Ambassador Hanford asked, do Chinese educational materials foster respect or disrespect toward religion? Do they heavily stress atheism?

BROADER ISSUES: CHURCH REGISTRATION, EXPULSIONS OF AMERICAN  
CITIZENS FOR RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES, AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES  
REGARDED AS SACRED (HAJJ AND REINCARNATION)

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¶17. (C) Ambassador Hanford turned to three broader issues: registration, religious traditions considered sacred by Tibetan Buddhists and Uighur Muslims and the Government's treatment of American religious believers in China. Ambassador Hanford raised the issue of registration of churches and other places of worship and welcomed the 2005 enactment of the Chinese Government's Regulation on Religious Affairs, which the United States understands is intended in part to clarify the procedures for registering religious groups. There is widespread support for the registration of greater numbers of religious groups, but it is surprising that more groups have not been allowed to register to date. To allow religious groups to have a full role in building a harmonious society, these groups must have a legal place in society. Unfortunately, the channel for registration is not effectively serving this function for the vast numbers of peace-loving, law-abiding citizens of various faiths in China. Some groups have tried to register over a period of months or years, but without success. Their applications were not accepted by local officials or the Central Government.

¶18. (C) There is also a problem with the relationship between religious groups and official institutions, Ambassador Hanford observed. Many religious groups hold peaceful, patriotic views, and yet their exact views on theological or religious matters may not be exactly identical to those held by the five major patriotic organizations. These religious groups will not register if they have to change their beliefs or accept supervision by one of the five patriotic organizations or the Central Government. In the past, the Chinese Government expressed concerns that some of these groups might be dangerous cults, and said that some have violent intentions. The USG approach differs from that of the Chinese Government in that United States supports the free expression of religious views everywhere, including in religious venues. When it comes to registering, the Chinese Government works with additional sensitivities and restrictiveness. Nevertheless, Ambassador Hanford urged Chinese authorities to quickly begin registering religious groups that are peaceful and non-subversive. These groups could contribute greatly to the national effort to build a "Harmonious Society." By registering these groups, China would increase these groups' transparency and open lines of communication between religious groups and the Chinese Government. Ambassador Hanford stressed that members of groups that are legal have more of a stake in society and are less vulnerable to radical ideologies.

¶19. (C) Hong Kong offers a good example, Ambassador Hanford said. Religious groups are autonomous and run by and large by Chinese citizens of Hong Kong. They play a positive role in serving the social, economic and spiritual needs of people in Hong Kong. Registration is easy, so most groups register voluntarily. They may have different beliefs, but they are peaceful, patriotic and have good relations with the Government.

¶20. (C) Ambassador Hanford expressed concern regarding reports that the Government has expelled more than one hundred foreigners (many of them American citizens) from China for their alleged illegal religious activities, mostly from the province of Xinjiang. He noted reports that American businesses have also been subjected to discrimination because of their faith-based business principles. He urged the Chinese Government not to punish American citizens for peaceful religious activities. (NOTE: The Government accused many of the expelled foreigners of



violating Articles 8 and 9 of China's Regulation on the Management of Foreigners' Religious Activities" by proselytizing. However, many of the American citizens deny having proselytized.)

¶21. (C) Ambassador Hanford said that the Government has enacted restrictions that infringe upon sacred religious traditions of Tibetan Buddhists and Uighur Muslims. As an example, Ambassador Hanford cited the freedom to select spiritual leaders, which is violated by a new measure that asserts Government control over the selection of "reincarnate living Buddhas." Ambassador Hanford stated that this measure is hard to understand, because the Chinese Communist Party does not allow its members to hold religious beliefs, and yet considers itself capable of discerning the appropriate spiritual leadership of a religious group. In addition, Ambassador Hanford urged the Chinese Government to revise policies that restrict travel between monasteries by Tibetan monks and to cease the patriotic education campaigns in Tibet that are pushing Tibetans to denounce the Dalai Lama.

¶22. (C) On the Muslim issues of the Hajj pilgrimage and Ramadan celebrations, Ambassador Hanford asked the Chinese Government to loosen existing restrictions. The United States shares China's great concern regarding combating radical Islam, to the point where Ambassador Hanford has devoted a great deal of effort in his position to convince Saudi Arabia to moderate its educational materials, which it has agreed to do beginning this school year. These educational materials are distributed all over the world, and so are influential in determining whether young people in Muslim communities throughout the world become radicalized. The United States understands Chinese concerns regarding radical Islam, but notes that in recent years there have been few terrorist incidents in China. Ambassador Hanford noted reports that Uighurs are prohibited from going on the Hajj unless they travel with an approved group, and that Hajj participants must be between 50 and 70 years old and may not depart from a third country. These are severe restrictions, he said. He asked China to consider lifting reported restrictions on praying and fasting during Ramadan, particularly for government workers, students and Communist Party members.

#### CHINESE RESPONSE FOCUSED ON EDUCATION AND REGISTRATION

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¶23. (C) DG Wu Hailong asked SARA Foreign Affairs Department DG Guo Wei to respond. Guo noted that the United States and China agree on some issues and disagree on others, but Chinese policy remains "consistent and clear-cut." Guo stated that China has made progress on religion in many ways and that its policies are consistent. China's constitution stipulates that all citizens enjoy freedom of religious belief and, since children are citizens, that right extends even to those under the age of 18, Guo stated. The Constitution also stipulates that no one can use religion to disrupt the state education system; as a result, the law on education states that China practices separation of religion and education. Religious education is not a component of public education in China.

¶24. (C) Religious education in China is carried out in seminaries, Guo continued, in the form of training of religious workers. In the case of minors who follow their parents to church and receive church services, the Government never interferes. Guo highlighted that religion is widely practiced among ethnic minorities, and that the children in these minority groups are taught their religion by their parents or guardians without any Government interference. There are special courses held in churches for minors, one of which Secretary Rice visited.

¶25. (C) House church registration and meetings raise two issues in China. The first is the registration of religious groups. According to Chinese law, religious groups should apply for registration with the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) as a civil organization. The registration of religious

sites (of religious groups registered with the MCA) should be done with the local bureau of religious affairs. At all levels, including state, provincial and county, there are thousands of religious groups registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs. Conditions for registration are the same as for any other civil organization. Some religious groups that wait months or years before receiving a denial should undertake "administrative lawsuits" against the offending agency.

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¶26. (C) "House meetings" are different in China than they are in the West. In China, friends and family are permitted to carry out "house meetings" that consist of Bible study or prayer meetings at home. If house meetings do not disrupt normal order "or make big noises," they will be permitted. "House meetings" are not the same as Western "house churches." Guo noted that as far as she knows, in Beijing many believers practice this kind of house meeting, and some of the participants go to registered churches. The problem occurs when "so-called" house meetings grow to become large-scale home churches attracting hundreds or even a thousand people at a time. This far exceeds the definition of "friends and family." These acts are not Bible study or prayer, Guo emphasized. They include developing the church organization, recruiting new members and other activities that require a trained religious worker in accordance with rules and regulations. This is contrary to the teaching of Protestantism, she said.

There are other complicating factors involved, she continued.

For example, some people carry out acts to make money through their house churches, or they receive support or influence from outside the country. The Chinese Government must persuade and educate those who commit these acts and encourage them to pursue their religious activities in an actual church. Ambassador Hanford responded by saying that he would discuss these and other issues in greater detail at his meeting with the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) the following day (May 27).

A/S KRAMER RAISES KEY TIBET POINTS

¶27. (C) A/S Kramer raised the issue of Tibet again in the afternoon session, expanding on points made in the morning session. He noted three key points:

- The families of those detained after the March protests lack information concerning their loved ones' whereabouts. It would be very helpful and positive for them to have this information.

- Lawyers have offered to defend the Tibetan detainees but have not been allowed to do so. Instead, these lawyers have been harassed and threatened with the possibility of losing their law licenses. A/S Kramer urged China to ensure that no punitive action is taken against the lawyers. The United States urged China to provide detainees with due process of law.

- The patriotic education campaigns that require Tibetans to denounce the Dalai Lama are of great concern. These campaigns may trigger the exact opposite response to the one intended. Denouncing the Dalai Lama is extremely difficult for Tibetan people and will exacerbate tensions and cause further problems. A/S Kramer noted that he planned to continue the day's discussion on Tibet over dinner and during meetings scheduled for May 27.

¶28. (C) In closing, Director General Wu noted that the resumption of the U.S.-China human rights dialogue after six years sends a positive signal to the world that both governments are willing to approach differences in a constructive manner and to turn the human rights issue into a positive issue in bilateral relations. The hope is that the

United States will have a better understanding of conditions in China, and the two sides will be able to exchange information on sensitive issues and realize agreement on a number of issues. Though it is impossible to narrow all of our differences, Wu said, this human rights dialogue offers a "sound starting point."

¶29. (C) The traveling party cleared this cable.  
PICCUTA